بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم

A CRITICAL READING OF MARTIN LINGS'
MUHAMMAD ﷺ: HIS LIFE BASED ON THE EARLIEST SOURCES
Foreword to the first Swedish translation

Twenty-three years after its first publication in 1983, *Muḥammad ﷺ: his life based on the earliest sources* by the late Abū Bakr Sirāj al-Dīn (Martin Lings, d. 2004) continues its lead as the best-written work of Prophetic biography in English and has now been translated into a dozen languages. The readers' blurbs from distinguished writers on the back cover call it "superb... scrupulous... exhaustive... mesmerising... easy and absorbing... enthralling... engrossing... majestic... gripping... fascinat[ing]." Indeed, Lings' lofty English, his knowledge of genealogy, his reflexive and worshipful narrative style, and his excellent *adab* with the Prophet ﷺ all deserve such glowing praise.

Knowledge of Genealogy

Lings' keen sense of the family tree and tribal kinships of the Prophet, upon him and them blessings and peace, makes for a rich intertext of Prophetic *Shamā'il* and *Khaṣā'iṣ*, *Ahl al-Bayt* and Companion lore, and general *Sīra* historiography inside his *Sīra* itself. Note how much of those arts he packs into this brief paragraph in Chapter XIII ("The Household"):

> Muḥammad's eldest uncle, Ḥārith [ibn ʿAbd al-Muṭṭalib], who was now dead, had left many children, and one of the sons, his cousin Abū Sufyān, was also his foster-brother, having been nursed by Ḥalīmah amongst the Banī Saʿd a few years after himself. People would say that Abū Sufyān was of those who bore the closest family likeness to Muḥammad; and amongst the characteristics they had in common was eloquence. But Abu Sufyān was a gifted poet – perhaps more gifted than his uncles Zubayr and Abū Ṭālib – whereas Muḥammad had never shown any inclination to compose a poem, though he was unsurpassed in his mastery of Arabic, and in the beauty of his speech.

High English

Lings' lofty style evokes the beauty of the language of the Quran and Hadith, as in these renditions of the meanings of the Blessed Quran:

> (Chapter XVI, page 45, paragraph 5) *By the morning brightness, and by the night when it is still, thy Lord hath not forsaken thee nor doth He hate thee, and the last shall be better for thee than the first, and thy Lord shall give and give unto thee, and thou shalt be satisfied...*
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> (XVI, 48, 3) *Verily We shall load thee with a word of heavy weight.*
>
> (XXIII, 67, 3) *Verily those who say: "Our Lord is God", and who then follow straight His path, on them descend the Angels saying: "Fear not nor grieve, but hearken to good tidings of the Paradise which ye are promised. We are your protecting friends in this lower life, and in the Hereafter wherein ye shall be given that which your souls long for, that which ye pray for, in bounty from Him who is All-Forgiving, All-Merciful."*

And the meanings of the Noble Ḥadīth:

> (XXXI, 99, 1) "I take refuge in the Light of Thy Countenance whereby all darknesses are illuminated and the things of this world and the next are rightly ordered, lest Thou make descend Thine anger upon me, or lest Thy wrath beset me. Yet it is Thine to reproach until Thou art well pleased. There is no power and no might except through Thee."
>
> (LIV, 193, 4) Unlike most of the dead [of Uḥud], the man of Muzaynah who had fought so valiantly had none of his people present, for his nephew had also fought to the death. So the Prophet went to him and stood beside him saying: "May God be pleased with thee, even as I am pleased with thee."

Islamic Manner of Mentioning the Prophet ﷺ

Lings does not mention the Holy Prophet ﷺ by name from the time he became Prophet but only by his Prophetic titles – except when citing the disbelievers through free indirect speech. This courtesy reflects the ethics of the Quran and those of his Companions, upon him and them blessings and peace.

Rare Reports

Lings relies much on al-Wāqidī's *Maghāzī* and mentions a couple of rare, moving reports exclusively found in this book:

1. The pilgrims, stopping to camp at Ḥudaybiya, find themselves short of water, whereupon the Holy Prophet ﷺ (as he did on many other occasions related in the two *Ṣaḥīḥ*s) turned the dregs of a dried-up hollow into a gushing spring. This miracle was soon followed by another one, namely, the Prophet's ﷺ disclosure of his knowledge of what the ever-obdurate ᶜAbd Allāh ibn Ubay ibn Salūl had commented in denial of the first miracle without being informed of it by a human witness:

> (LXVI, 249, 2) One or two of the hypocrites were amongst the pilgrims, including Ibn Ubayy; and, as he sat drinking his fill, one of his fellow clansmen addressed him saying: "Out upon thee, O father of Ḥubāb, hath not the time now come for thee to see how thou art placed? What more than this can there be?" "I have seen the like of this before," said Ibn Ubayy, whereupon the other man remonstrated with him so threateningly that Ibn Ubayy went with his son to the Prophet to forestall trouble and to say that he had been misunderstood. But before he had time to speak the Prophet said to him: "Where hast thou seen the like of that which thou hast seen this day?" He answered: "I have never seen the like of it." "Then why," said the Prophet, "didst say what thous saidst?" "I ask forgiveness of God," said Ibn Ubayy. "O Messenger of God," said his son, "ask forgiveness for him," and the Prophet did so. [Wāqidī 2:589]

2. (LXXIV, 296, 2) During the march on one of these days the Prophet saw a bitch lying by the side of the road with a litter of recently born pups which she was feeding, and he was afraid that she might be molested by one or another of the men. So he told Juᶜayl [ibn Surāqah] of Ḍamrah to stand on guard beside her until every contingent had passed. [Wāqidī 2:804]

Imām Aḥmad said that Muḥammad ibn ᶜUmar ibn Wāqid al-Aslamī al-Wāqidī (d. 207) was an "expert in the battles and campaigns" but "haphazard in assigning his chains of transmission." His rank as a ḥadīth narrator varies from "very weak" *(ḍaīf jiddan)* and "discarded *(matrūk)* to "fair" *(ḥasan)*. Ibn Taymiyya asserts, "No two people differ over the fact that al-Wāqidī is among the most knowledgeable of authorities in the details of military campaigns and among the best experts in all that pertains to them" while al-Dhahabī said, "There is no disagreement over the fact that he is weak, but he is honest and very valuable" and he is declared reliable by Ibn Sayyid al-Nās, al-ᶜAynī, Ibn al-ᶜArabī, Ibn Daqīq al-ᶜĪd, Ibn al-Humām, and others as documented by Abū Ghudda in his *Thalāth Rasā'il fī ᶜIlm Muṣṭalaḥ al-Ḥadīth* (p. 124-125 n.) and Ibn Taymiyya in *al-Ṣārim al-Maslūl ᶜalā Shātim al-Rasūl* ﷺ (p. 97). A junior contemporary of Ibn Isḥāq, al-Wāqidī is the principal source of Imām al-Ṭabarī (d. 310) in the latter's *Tārīkh* and his student and scribe Muḥammad ibn Saᶜd (d. 230) relied heavily on him in his *Ṭabaqāt*.

Analytical Dimension

At times Lings writes not only to narrate but to reflect – a *Fiqh al-Sīra* of sorts before al-Ghazālī and al-Būṭī – and makes keen observations, particularly in analysis of the attitude of the Jews toward the revelation: "[G]enerally speaking, whereas the Arabs were in favour of the man but against the message, the Jews were in favour of the message but against the man" (XIX, 57, 1) and the entire paragraph that begins "Many of the Jews welcomed at first what seemed to be the end of all danger of a further outbreak of civil war in the oasis" (XXXIX, 127, 2). Of the arch-hypocrite of Madīna, ᶜAbd Allāh ibn Ubay ibn Salūl, he says "it was his policy to be as non-committal as possible, but he sometimes betrayed his feelings despite himself" (XXXIX, 128, 5). Lings is at his most brilliant in the Banū Qurayẓa chapter (LXI) and in the last four chapters of the book, particularly his superb contextualization of the ḥadīth of Ghadīr Khumm (LXXXIII, 338, 2-3) which the sectarians have misused so much to wreak havoc on the *Umma*'s unity. To Allāh is our return!

With the possible exception of Shaykh Muḥammad Saᶜīd al-Būṭī's superior *Sīra* entitled *Jurisprudence of the Prophetic Biography* (now available in English translation at Dār al-Fikr), even among Arabic books, in all these respects I cannot think of a single contemporary work that gathers all those accomplishments under a single roof. Allah have mercy on Abū Bakr Sirāj al-Dīn Lings and reward him abundantly!

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With great pleasure and thanks to Allāh, therefore, I am honored to present the first Swedish translation of Lings' *Sīra* to the public. Ann-Catrin Nilsson, the author of this translation, completed it in the lifetime of the author and with his authorization. Her translation was proofread by Muhammed Knut Bernström, the author of the standard Swedish interpretation of the Quran. I trust that those who read Swedish will judge her work to be of the highest standard.

Genesis of This Critical Reading

It is also true that there are many problems with Lings' book. The subtle modifications inserted by Lings into the reprints of his Prophetic biography over the years, in the form of footnotes (possibly also in the text itself), show some acknowledgment of the need for amendments. This was not enough. Accordingly, Ms. Nilsson took the right approach in presenting Dr. Lings, two years ago, with five specific queries she thought "would need elucidation from an Islamic point of view." She told me she wrote Lings the following:

> "There are ... some topics that I, having consulted well-informed muslims, think would need elucidation from an islamic point of view. I list them here:
>
> "Chapter I:
> Can I add a note explaining that Hagar and Sarah, according to islamic tradition, were friends and wives on equal terms and that it was not, as in the biblical version, the anger of Sarah that drove Hagar out in the desert but the voice and will of God?
>
> "Chapter VI:
> Is there a note to be added about the source of the statement (on p. 17): "Moreover one Christian had been allowed and even encouraged to paint an icon of the Virgin Mary and the child Christ on an inside wall of the Ka´bah, where it sharply contrasted with all the other paintings."?
>
> "Chapter XI:
> Would you mind a note about what is meant by "average height and average strenght" when applied to the Prophet (SAS)?
>
> "Chapter LIV:
> Here also a note seems appropriate since the interpretation: "…for God created Adam in His image" might lead the mind in the direction of trying to visualize God as having a face. I have been told that the arabic language is equally open to the following interpretation, which should be the one more in conformity with the general islamic view: God created man in Adams (AS) image.
>
> "Chapter LVIII:
> Should a note be added to stress that the marriage of Zainab and the Prophet (SAS) first and foremost came about, as the Quran says: "*so that it should not be difficult for true believers to wed the wives of their adopted sons if they divorced them."* (Q. 33: 37)?
>
> "If you don't mind notes beeing added on the points given above I will insh'Allâh consult a qualified person to formulate them and this being done let you know the result as soon as possible."

These queries are a representative sample of the honest questions any informed Muslim reader may ask herself about Lings' *Sīra*. My own recent re-reading of the book, as the critical notes below show, conjured up the same issues, among other cruxes which definitely need to be addressed. Ms. Nilsson offered that any answers Dr. Lings might forward be inserted as footnotes to the Swedish text. When he turned down that offer in a subsequent telephone conversation he had with her and "forbade any notes whatsoever beyond his own," she turned to me to provide what she considered a necessary commentary.

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Run from Muslim Publishers!

Lings' refusal that anyone but himself "clarify" his text is justified. One look at the cannibalizing of two classic texts in recent years by purportedly Islamic publishing houses, Muhammad Marmaduke Pickthall's *The Meaning of the Glorious Koran* and Abdullah Yusuf Ali's *The Holy Quran; English translation & commentary* is deterrent enough from ever trusting a *daʿwa*-toting publisher again. Malaysia's Islamic Book Trust had the gall to preface their act with a protestation of "their sacred duty as Muslims" to alter Pickthall's original text because of the "285 mistakes" they and their friends decided, in their wisdom, stood in their way of what the text should read. No critical appendix or preface, no commentary, no footnotes, no list of those so-called mistakes; just *taḥrīf* in broad daylight. Others brazenly plagiarize the cover type, design, background color, and even the title, as London's Ta-Ha Publishers did with their 1988 *Life of Muḥammad ﷺ : his life based on the earliest sources* by a certain Tahia Al-Ismail, a *copie conforme* of Lings' bestselling title!

Literary quality and trust, sadly, are no longer part of the moral landscape of Muslims involved in the publishing sector. It has become a heart-rending experience to browse in an Islamic bookstore. For every one *Reliance of the Traveller* you will see ninety-nine potboilers from the Khan-Hilali *Ḥāṭib Layl* School of Defacement of the Quran and Sunna; Mawdūdī fare, bowdlerized (*Renewal and Reform in Islām)*; a Harun Yahya cornucopia for those who favor pictures over text; lots of soulless, wordy books about sufism, jurisprudence, intellectual history, and politics which all shirk the standard set by the *Reliance* and do not rise higher than the paper they are written on; and the ubiquitous *Pork: Reasons for Its Prohibition in Islām*. More than ninety-nine percent of all those editions, translations, thoughts and philosophies are unfit for publication (although *Pork: Reasons for Its Prohibition in Islām* may be ideal for *daʿwa* by porcuphobes to porcuphiles).

Whence the boom? As Lings noted in his *Ancient Beliefs and Modern Superstitions* there is nothing new to say. However, as the Holy Prophet, upon him blessings and peace, predicted: *"Yafshū al-qalam,"* "The pen shall proliferate." To make things worse, the natural logorrhea of "the modern mind" is exponentially boosted by the immoral sub-standards of our authors, publishers, and distributors. "This knowledge used to be a noble affair," al-Awzāʿī said, "until book-writing brought into it those that have no share in it." That was thirteen hundred years ago. Now, the Tower of Babel is complete. Everyone is a writer, including the businessbrothers who package bad, semi-bad, and almost not bad products with assembly-line diligence for consumption and propaganda and their accomplices on the distribution end. The day I saw fresh glossy prints of Albānī's *The Prophet's Prayer* being promoted in a bookstore owned by a polyglot former student of Shaykh Muḥammad ibn ʿAlawī al-Mālikī I lost the remainder of my *ḥusn al-ẓann*. When a graduate of the greatest Sunni educator of the last quarter-century loses his bearings on what is and what is not acceptable teaching of the first pillar of the *Dīn* after the *Shahāda*, there is no more denying the reality of "Nothing shall remain of Islām except its name, nothing of Religion except its image."

"And We shall turn unto the work they did and make it scattered motes." It is understandable that a conscious writer and bibliophile such as Lings would want no part in this corruption. Nevertheless, our directive is *naṣīḥa* – to stand for truth – and our firm belief is that he would, no doubt, have taken well-founded advice to heart and acted upon it. Now that he is gone, his book has entered a new phase. We might see it slashed and hacked in one, ten, or seventy-five years by the kinglets of print. They may even employ these very notes to hone their editorial axes but Allāh is our witness we are innocent of their crimes. Our intention is only to set the record straight on some facts of doctrine, Quran and Sunna commentary, Prophetic biography, and the Prophetic Attributes – not at the expense of Lings' text, but only as this prefatory study, in a text separate from his. I believe he was a noble man who would have been pleased with this. Ibn Kathīr relates that when the great Imām al-Ḥākim al-Naysābūrī was informed that the ḥadīth master ʿAbd al-Ghanī ibn Saʿīd al-Miṣrī had written a corrective critique entitled *Al-Ḥākim's Mistakes*, he took to reading from the latter in his public gatherings and would supplicate on behalf of ʿAbd al-Ghanī and thank him. May Allāh Most High instil this critical reading with the same spirit of justice and with the respect due to His truthful authors and their work.

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This critique falls under various topical headings, some of which I address in the next six sections, leaving the rest for a systematic passage-by-passage review in column format. These six headings – poetic license, dubious Quran and Hadith commentary, misreferencing, urge for pulchritude, Catholic paraphernalia, and "Perennialism" – are not necessarily the more important ones but they came to mind first. The remaining material was arranged mostly in the order in which it appeared in the book.

Poetic License

Poetic license marks off *Muhammad ﷺ: his life based on the earliest sources* from all other serious Prophetic biographies. It it is fair to say Lings often has more imagination than knowledge of what he describes and never takes to heart the absolute prohibition of fiction in Islām with regard to the Prophet ﷺ. Consequently, his constant embroidery detracts from the reliability of his book and, much as it is meant to enhance reading, brings it down to the romance level from which its title-page homage to "the earliest sources" had promised to exempt it.

It is also possible that Lings spent little time in Muslim lands (although he kept company with René Guénon in Cairo for a while), where he normally would have absorbed some of the sensibilities of Muslims and might have avoided or at least suppressed, after the fact, the two or three more momentous misinterpretations in *Muḥammad: his life based on the earliest sources*. He defended them in reprint after reprint by beefing up his footnotes with references he thought provided enough justification. Instead, surely, he should have done away altogether with those passages. One of them is the "lightly clad" Zaynab scene – in his defense an error of taste that predates him; but an error, nevertheless, that "betokens ignorance of the immense rights and merits of the Prophet ﷺ" according to Qaḍī Abū Muḥammad al-Qushayrī al-Mālikī as cited by Qāḍī ʿIyāḍ in *al-Shifā*. (How greatly would Lings and many other biographers of the Prophet ﷺ have profited from reading that book before they set to their task!) Another such misinterpretation is the "Kaʿba icon" episode (more below).

Dubious Quran and Hadith Commentary

Lings is at his weakest in one of his final chapters entitled "The Degrees" (LXXXI), which is replete with incautious interpretations or misreporting of Quran and Hadith. Inherent in the reality of degrees and levels in the Religion is the notion of the elite of humankind, the Believers, and the elite of the Believers, the Friends of God. However, Lings turns this notion into a skewed elitism which characterizes the massive majority of people as blind (LXXXI, 329, 3): "Degrees of superiority are also implied by the Revelation in its mention of the heart. In speaking of the majority, it says: *Not blind are the eyes, but blind are the hearts within the breasts.*" The commentaries are clear that it is not "the majority" at all who are meant but the disbelievers in general, and the disbelievers of Mecca at the time of the Prophet ﷺ in particular.

Lings' thoroughly confused attempt at forcing *those of the right*, *the righteous*, *the slaves of God* and *the foremost* into his own special concept of a spiritual hierarchy (LXXXI, 329, 2) stems from a similar penchant for speculative originality in disregard of qualified sources. In the same chapter (LXXXI, 329, 3) Lings claims that al-Ḥakīm al-Tirmidhī in *Nawādir al-Uṣūl* reported "that of Abū Bakr the Prophet said: 'He surpasseth you not through much fasting and prayer but he surpasseth you in virtue of something that is fixed in his heart.'" However, al-Ḥakīm only narrated this statement (in *Aṣl* 220) as a saying of the great *Tābiʿī* Bakr ibn ʿAbd Allāh al-Muzanī, not a Prophetic ḥadīth.

Predictably, Lings also misinterprets (LXXXI, 330, 1) the famous saying of Abū Hurayra, "I have treasured in my memory two stores of knowledge which I had from the Messenger of God. One of them have I divulged; but if I divulged the other ye would cut [my] throat" along the same lines of special-hidden-knowledge-for-the-elite-only. It is simply "I have retained two stores" *(ḥafiẓtu)* and the undisseminated knowledge is nothing more esoteric than the identities of strife-mongers, specifically Banū Umayya, which Abū Hurayra elaborates in other ḥadīths in which he decries the governor of Madīna Marwān ibn al-Ḥakam, warns of a disaster about to befall the Arabs, and prays for death before the year 60, the year Yazīd ibn Muʿāwiya came to power. Some deny all this and cling to their uninformed misrepresentation of Abū Hurayra as referring to spiritual realities when it is not he but rather Abū Bakr and ʿAlī, Allāh be well-pleased with all of them, who are established as the conveyors of such realities in the ḥadīth and famous as such in Sufi literature and chains of transmission as well.

Misreferencing

(XXXII, 102, 1) Lings references the narration "I was a Prophet when Adam was yet between water and clay" to "Tir. XLVI, 1; A.H. IV, 66." This is false sourcing and the narration itself is a forgery which neither al-Tirmidhī nor Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal narrate. What they do narrate is: "I was a Prophet when Ādam was yet between spirit and body."

(LXVIII, 258, 2) Of the *Ṣaḥābī* Abū Baṣīr, Lings states that "his companions prayed over him and buried him, and made a mosque at the place of his burial; then they went to join the Prophet in Medina." He references this to "Wāqidī 624-9; Bukhārī LIV; Ibn Isḥāq 751-3." This is nowhere to be found in al-Bukhārī but is found in the *Sīra* books. It is interesting that the "Salafī" censor al-Muʿallimī overlooked it in his *ʿImārat al-Qubūr*. If authentic it probably ante-dated the curse of those who build mosques over the graves of the pious unless what is meant in the Abū Baṣīr report is proximity, not super-position or using a grave for *qibla*.

In his "Key to References" (p. 352) at the end of the book Lings misattributes the *Mishkāt al-Maṣābīḥ* to Imām Ḥusayn ibn Masʿūd al-Farrā' al-Baghawī (d. 516) who actually compiled the work on which the *Mishkāt* is based, *Maṣābīḥ al-Sunna*, while the *Mishkāt* itself is its expansion and was compiled two centuries and a quarter later by Walī al-Dīn Muḥammad ibn ʿAbd Allāh al-Khaṭīb al-Tibrīzī. Lings also incorrectly identifies al-Baghawī as "Ḥusayn ibn Maḥmūd."

Urge for Pulchritude

Among the oddest leitmotifs of the book are Lings' preoccupation with and free dramatizing of physical beauty. Khadījah "knew that she herself was still beautiful" (XII, 35, 1); Zaynab bint Jaḥsh was "a girl of outstanding beauty" (XIII, 40, 1); "Ruqayyah was the most beautiful of their daughters and one of the most beautiful women of her generation" (XXIV, 70, 1); Hind bint ᶜAbd al-Muṭṭalib "was a woman of great beauty" (XXIV, 72, 1); on one and the same page: "most of them [the emigrants to Abyssinia] were young, and in many of them their piety of demeanour was enhanced by a great natural beauty"; "a Christian dignitary..., a man so exceptionally handsome as to arouse general admiration"; "the beautiful Umm Salamah" (XXVII, 82, 2); "She [ᶜĀ'isha] was then only nine years old, a child of remarkable beauty, as might have been expected from her parentage" (XL, 132, 3); "Ḥafṣah was both beautiful and accomplished" (XLVII, 164, 3); "the young and beautiful Ṣafiyyah" (LXX, 270, 2); Rayḥānah "was a woman of great beauty" (LXI, 233, 2); "The girls were sisters, Māriyah and Sīrīn, and both were beautiful, but Māriyah was exceptionally so"; and so on and so forth.

Catholic Paraphernalia

Certain readers grumbled about the masonic imagery they said they found in the book. If true, this surely pales next to its inept mentions of the doctrines of baptism (XXVII, 82, 2), the Eucharist (*ibid.*), the bodily translation of the Virgin Mary (known as "Assumption") to the heaven at her death (XXXII, 101, 4), its comparison to the *Miᶜrāj* of the Prophet ﷺ (*ibid.*), the incarnation of the Deity in the flesh of Jesus (XXIII, 68, 4), and "the Holy Rood" *i.e.* the supposed wood of the cross of the Crucifixion (LXXIX, 319, 1). Note that the doctrine of the Assumption was unheard of in the early Christian Church but was formulated *after* Islām by John of Damascus in the eighth century after Christ and, in the West, became Catholic dogma only in 1950. As for the "Holy Rood" – also known to Catholics as the "True Cross" – its sole claim to authenticity is a fifth-century narration (by Socrates Scholasticus in his *Ecclesiastical History*) of its supposed discovery, a full century earlier, by Emperor Constantine's (280-337) aged mother Helena (248?-329?) in Jerusalem. Eusebius of Caesarea (264?-340) made no such mention in his *Life of Constantine* although he would have hardly omitted it if it had really taken place. The Persians captured the artifact in 614 then Heraclius seized it back from them and restored it to Jerusalem in 628 until Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn had it removed after the victory of Ḥiṭṭīn in 1187, never to be found again although, by then, medieval relic manufacturers and merchants had already filled Europe with the pseudo-fragments of the pseudo-Cross.

"Perennialism"

Lings advocates applying the title of *Furqān* not only to the Qurān but to "every revealed Scripture" (XXV, 76, 1). This is arguable if he means the word *furqān* in a metaphorical generic sense of separating truth from error. However, it is fair to say he means it literally so as to deny the exclusivity of the Quran as an universal Message among all revealed Scriptures and also the exclusivity of its abrogating status of all other Scriptures for all time, since he actually grants neither superiority nor abrogating-status to the Prophet Muḥammad ﷺ over all other Prophets and Messengers (LVIII, 212, 1). These are well-known "Perennialist" deviations in flat contradiction of Qurān, Sunna, and Consensus.

Lings' "Kaᶜba icons" episode is a notorious element of the Catholico-perennialist persona of his book. First he writes: (VI, 17, 2) "One Christian had been allowed and even encouraged to paint an icon of the Virgin Mary and the child Christ on an inside wall of the Kaᶜbah, where it sharply contrasted with all the other paintings." That the image was an "icon" in the ritual Christian Orthodox sense or, if not, that its painter was even a Christian; that he was actually "encouraged to paint" it; or that it "contrasted with all the other paintings" is all sourceless speculation and pure Lingsian poetic license. Then he writes in the chapter entitled "The Conquest of Mecca" (LXXV, 302, 4): "Apart from the icon of the Virgin Mary and the child Jesus, and a paiting of an old man, said to be Abraham, the walls inside had been covered with pictures of pagan deities. Placing his hand protectively over the icon, the Prophet told ᶜUthmān to see that all the other paintings, except that of Abraham, were effaced." The footnote continues: "Wāqidī's *Maghāzī* p. 834 and Azraqī's *Akhbār Makka* I, 107. But other accounts say 'all' without mention of these two exceptions." In reality *all* accounts say "all":

- Even these versions do not except the image of the Virgin Mary but only that of Ibrāhīm ﵇. Lings adds the word "other" from his own head in the clause "to see that all the *other* paintings, except that of Abraham, were effaced."

- Al-Wāqidī does not mention "pictures of pagan deities" but rather "imagery of angels and others."

- The Prophet ﷺ nowhere is said to be "placing his hand *protectively* over the icon" but rather: "Then he caught sight of the image of Maryam and immediately placed his hand over it *(thumma ra'ā ṣūrata Maryam fa-waḍaᶜa yadahu ᶜalayhā)*. Then he said *(thumma qāl)*: 'Erase every single image in it except the image of Ibrāhīm!'" If authentic, the meaning is – and Allāh knows best – that out of his magnificent sense of modesty and *adab* the Prophet ﷺ would not have anyone even glance at the image of the most pure Virgin Maryam before it was washed away at once – by himself – and her chastity protected.

- As for his excepting the image of Ibrāhīm, it only meant – and Allāh knows best – he was leaving it for last since it was Quranically the least offensive of all in comparison to Maryam and the angels, although its offensiveness is established from the fact he curses its painters: "Allāh destroy them! They made him an old man casting arrows for divination!"

- He does not address ᶜUthman but ᶜUmar; and on the same page actually tells him to erase the image of Ibrāhīm at last.

The pagination is from the Islamic Text Society's 2004 fifth reprint of their 1991 edition, itself based on the 1986 and 1988 reprints of the George Allen & Unwin original edition of 1983.

Chapter, page, ¶	Lings' Text	Commentary
I, 2, 2 VI, 15, 1	[Referring to Abraham's two Temples, one in Jerusalem and one in Mecca:] Two spiritual streams, two religions, two worlds for God; two circles, therefore two centres. They [Quraysh] knew that they lived at the centre of the world...	The one Centre is the Kaʿba (Q 3:96); through it God upholds the universes (Q 5:97) and it is called "the navel of the earth" in Arab poetry cf. al-Aṣfahānī, *Aṭbāq al-Dhahab* (*Maqāla* 99) as Lings himself acknowledges (VI, 15, 1). God calls "religion," especially for followers of the Prophet Abraham ﷷ, only the submission taught by the Prophet Muḥammad ﷺ (Q 7:156-157, 3:19, 3:85) abrogating all past Scriptures (Q 5:48).
I, 3, 1	Its name, Kaʿbah, is in virtue of its shape which is approximately cubic...	Anachronism. The cubic shape occured later, in the *Jāhiliyya*. The Prophet ﷺ stated that Abraham built it rectangular and thus did Ibn al-Zubayr rebuild it in his caliphate cf. *Ṣaḥīḥayn* and *Sunan*.
IV, 10, 1	Adjoining the north-west side of the Kaʿbah there is a small precinct surrounded by a low semicircular wall.... many pilgrims make wide their circle at this point and include the precinct within their orbit.... The space within it is named Ḥijr Ismāʿīl, because the tombs of Ishmael and Hagar lie beneath the stones which pave it.	False etiology and bad *fiqh*. Not "many" but all pilgrims *must* "make wide" their circumambulation which otherwise is invalid, as the semicircular precinct is part of the Kaʿba. The Ḥijr was thus named because Quraysh left stones *(ḥajar)* from the debris (*ḥaṭīm*, another name for it) of the original Kaʿba after rebuilding it, to mark off the spot. Beneath it is related to be the grave of Hagar alone cf. Yāqūt, *Muʿjam al-Buldān*. The apellation "Ḥijr Ismāʿīl" is very late and not found in the early sources but Allāh knows best.
IV, 11, 1	From there he [ʿAbd al-Muṭṭalib] began the rite of the rounds, going past the door to the Iraqi Corner, across the Ḥijr to the west corner...	False reconstruction of the ritual. Not "across the Ḥijr" but around it; see previous comment.
VII, 21, 2	After that day Quraysh were called by the Arabs "the people of God", and they were held in even greater respect than before, because God had answered their prayers and saved the Kaʿbah from destruction.	False etiology. As narrated by Zubayr ibn Bakkār the people did call Quraysh by that title after the Day of the Elephant, however, it had not emerged at that time but long before; Quraysh called themselves "the people of God" in justification of their refraining from going to ʿArafa with non-Qurayshites during pilgrimage for fear of detracting from the prestige of their sanctuary; hence the Divine command directed at them in Q 2:199 and the Prophetic reminder that "Pilgrimage is ʿArafa" in the *Sunan* and *Musnad* – as Lings himself acknowledges (LXXXIII, 336, 4).
XI, 31, 1	Muḥammad was of average height... ... and average strength.	Dubious translation of Anas' ﵁ ḥadīth in Muslim that he ﷺ was "neither too tall nor short" better Englished as "of proportionate height"; another states he was never seen with others but seemed taller. He ﷺ wrestled down Rukāna the strongman thrice and heaved a boulder over Ibn Maẓʿūn's grave when others gave up (both in Abū Dāwūd).

XII, 34, 6 [f.n.]	According to Islamic tradition Muḥammad is none other than the mysterious Shiloh, to whom would be transferred, "in the latter days", the spiritual authority which until then had remained the prerogative of the Jews, Jesus himself having been the last Prophet of the line of Judah. The prophecy in question was made by Jacob immediately before his death: *And Jacob called unto his sons and said, Gather yourselves together, that I may tell you that which shall befall you in the last days... The sceptre shall not depart from Judah, nor a lawgiver from between his feet, until Shiloh come; and unto him shall the gatherings of the people be.* (Gen. 49: I, 10).	Doctrinally false notions of "transfer" and "prerogative." If by "spiritual authority" is meant Prophethood then this was shared among 124,000 Prophets as revealed by the Prophet ﷺ in the ḥadīth of Abū Dharr ؓ in the *Musnad* and Ibn Ḥibbān's *Ṣaḥīḥ*, precluding any prerogative. If by authority is meant mandate, then the Seal of Prophets ﷺ alone had an universal mandate as opposed to the local mandates of all previous Prophets including the line of Judah. If knowledge, then the gentile al-Khaḍir ؑ teaching Moses ؑ (Q 18:65-82) is a case in point. All this is true regardless of the possibility that Jacob ؑ may well have predicted the advent of the Seal of Prophets ﷺ in that verse (if authentic), or elsewhere.
XII, 35, 1	In most of the earliest descriptions his [ﷺ] eyes are said to have been black, but according ot one or two of these they were brown, or even light brown.	Undependable assertion. The narrations of the Prophetic attributes state he was *adʿaj al-ʿaynayn* which means "of large, jet-black pupils," some commentators adding that it also means "and very white iris."
XII, 35, 2	[S]he [Khadīja] consulted a woman friend of hers named Nufaysah...	Mistransliteration of Nafīsa bint Umayya cf. Ibn Ḥajar, *Iṣāba*.
XIII, 39, 3	Muḥammad [ﷺ] preferred to ask for the help of ʿAbbās, who could well afford it, being a successful merchant, and who was close to him because they had been brought up together. Equally close, or even closer, was ʿAbbās's wife, Umm al-Faḍl, who loved him dearly and who always made him welcome at their house.	Speculative. True, Umm al-Faḍl Lubāba bint al-Ḥārith al-Hilāliyya was the Prophet's ﷺ sister-in-law as his wife Maymūna's sister, as well as his milk-daughter since she nursed al-Ḥusayn after Fāṭima gave birth to him. Nevertheless, there is no comparison to the bond between him and his paternal uncle al-ʿAbbās ؓ who was present with the *Anṣār* at al-ʿAqaba, served as his eyes and ears in Mecca until its conquest, was only two years older, and whom the Prophet ﷺ openly consulted and praised.
XIII, 40, 4	It was about this time that Umm Ayman became once more a member of the household. It is not recorded whether she returned as a widow, or whether her husband had divorced her. But she had no doubt that her place was there, and for his part Muḥammad would sometimes address her as "mother", and would say to others: "She is all that is left me of the people of my house." Ibn Saʿd VIII, 162.	Misreading of source, misunderstanding of *mawlā* (emancipee) status, and unwarranted poetic license. Ibn Saʿd does say Umm Ayman's first husband was killed at Ḥunayn then she married Zayd. As the Prophet's ﷺ *mawlāt* (as stated by Ibn Saʿd) she never ceased to be part of his household whether married or widowed, per her legal status from the time he freed her (like Salmān and Thawbān); lastly, the Prophet ﷺ *habitually* called her "mother" – not "sometimes."
XV, 44, 2	Then he [Waraqa] leaned towards him [the Prophet ﷺ] and kissed his forehead...	Mistranslation. He kissed the top of his head or fontanel *(yāfūkhuh)* cf. *Qāmūs* and other dictionaries.
XVI, 46, 2	The word *raḥīm*, an intensive form of *rāḥim*, merciful, was current in the sense of very merciful or boundlessly merciful. The still more intensive *raḥmān*, for lack of any concept to fit it, had fallen into disuse. The Revelation revived it in accordance with the new religion's basic need to dwell on the heights of Transcendence.	Fanciful etiology. The Arabs considered *raḥīm* an Arabic word and *raḥmān* Hebrew cf. al-Qurṭubī, *al-Asnā fī Sharḥ Asmā' Allāh al-Ḥusnā* (1:64-65). "Certain simpletons claim that the Arabs did not know the name *Raḥmān* because they denied it (Q 25:60), as if they necessarily denied only what they did not know!" Al-Ṭabarī, *Tafsīr* (1:57).

XVI, 49, 3	... to which the answer is "And on you be Peace!", the plural being used to include the two guardian Angels of the person greeted.	Doctrinally misleading. The "two guardian angels" is a Christian notion while the Quran and Sunna teach that for each person there are up to twenty angels recording deeds, implementing destiny, mentoring, etc. cf. al-Suyūṭī, *al-Ḥabā'ik fī Akhbār al-Malā'ik*.
XVII, 50, 1	Abū Lahab showed plainly his conviction that his nephew was self-deceived, if not a deceiver.	Excessive poetic license. They said "seer," "poet," "sorcerer." Where did they say "self-deceived"?
XVII, 51, 1	The Prophet laid his hand on the back of [the thirteen-year old] ʿAlī's neck and said: "This is my brother, mine executor and my successor among you. Hearken unto him and obey him."	This report comes only through the Kūfan Rāfiḍī Abū Maryam ʿAbd al-Ghaffār ibn al-Qāsim ibn Qays al-Najjārī whom Ibn al-Madīnī accused of forgery cf. al-Burhān al-Ḥalabī, *al-Kashf al-Ḥathīth*.
XVIII, 54, 2	Another encounter with the Prophet had the result of bringing Islam to the Bani Daws, who were also, like Ghifār, an outlying Western tribe.	Wrong geography. Daws were a tribe of the ʿUdthān clan centered at Tharūq south of the peninsula while Ghifār were centered between Mecca and Madīna by the wells of Badr cf. Shurrāb, *al-Maʿālim al-Athīra fil-Sunnati wal-Sīra*.
XXII, 65, 1	"... And as for thee, Abū Jahl, a calamity shall come upon thee. Little shalt thou laugh, and much shalt thou weep." Ṭabarī 1203, 3.	Mistranslation. Al-Ṭabarī has "And as for thee, Abū Jahl, by God, before very long, little shalt thou laugh, and much shalt thou weep."
XXIII, 68, 4	According to the Koran, Jesus is both *Messenger of God* and also *His Word which He cast unto Mary, and a Spirit from Him* (Q 4:171); and as it had been with the Word-made-flesh, so now analogously, it was through the Divine Presence in this world of the Word-made-book that Islam was a religion in the true sense...	Doctrinally heretical. The verse has *innamā*, stating that Jesus was *only* A Messenger, not The Message also. The word cast on Mary was "Be" (3:47, 3:59). "Be" never becomes flesh but is the Divine Speech by which creation is created, including Jesus. The spirit is the (created) soul of Jesus himself or the (created) angel who brought it (19:17), not a Divine element. There is no "Be" with the Book because the Quran is not created, hence it is never a "Word-made-book" and the analogy is an enormity. Lings' errors come straight from Frithjof Schuon's 1961 book *Understanding Islām*.
XXIV, 70, 2	"I [Ṭulayb] beg thee [Arwā] to go and greet him and say thou believest in him and testify that *There is no god but God*." She did what he had said...	Incomplete translation. Ibn Saʿd's two versions both add, "*and Muḥammad is the Messenger of God*."
XXVI, 78, 3	Dhu l-Qarnayn, *he of the two horns*... to make a barrier that would protect them from Gog and Magog and other jinn...	Mistranslation of *he of the two horizons* and misidentification of Gog and Magog as jinn when all the commentaries relate they are human beings.
XXVII, 82, 2	[The Abyssinians] looked down on them [the Meccans] as heathens.... They themselves were Christians, many of them devout; they had been baptised, they worshipped the One God, and they carried in their flesh the sacrament of the Eucharist. As such they were sensitive to the difference between the sacred and the profane.	Doctrinally abhorrent and rhetorically tasteless. They *say* they worship the One God then say "three" (Q 4:171). While reveling in free indirect speech Lings misses the irony that in the Muslim context such sacrament as eating the flesh and drinking the blood of a slain-then-resurrected god incarnate is the profanest Bacchic mystery paganism imaginable.
XXIX, 89, 4	The eye of the heart, though closed in fallen man, is able to take in a glimmering of light and this is faith.	A doctrinally false mix of post-lapsarianism and T. Lobsang Rampa. A Muslim might say: The heart, unless blinded by sin, is able to discern the light of faith and this is remembrance of God.

XXX, 93-94	"Lo, everything save God is naught." "Thou hast spoken true," said ʿUthmān. Labīd went on: "And all delights away shall vanish." "Thou liest," exclaimed ʿUthmān. "The delight of Paradise shall never vanish." ... [The Prophet's ﷺ] only recorded comment was: "The truest word that poet ever spake is: 'Lo, everything save God is naught.'" He did not blame Labīd for the words which immediately followed. The poet could be credited with meaning that "all earthly delights away shall vanish"; and on the other hand, all Paradises and Delights which are eternal can be thought of as included in God....	False speculation and misreading. Labīd undoubtedly meant the words in the usual pagan Arab sense of *"There is nothing but our life of the world"* (Q 45:24). Together with affirming the existence of God they denied the hereafter. ʿUthmān understood this on the spot as did the Prophet ﷺ and everyone else. Hence, the Prophet's ﷺ statement in praise of Labīd's first line was an implicit dispraise of the second in confirmation of both ʿUthmān's reactions.
XXXII, 102, 1	[H]e again mounted Burāq, who moved his wings in upward flight.... as they passed through the seven heavens....	Inauthentic. Ibn Isḥāq and the sources are clear that the Burāq remained in Jerusalem while the Prophet ﷺ ascended on the literal *miʿrāj* or ladder. The only source that mentions its wings is Ibn Saʿd from his teacher al-Wāqidī cf. Ibn Ḥajar, *Fatḥ al-Bārī*.
	Everything he now saw, he saw with the eye of the Spirit .... (in the *Miʿrāj*)	Doctrinally false. There is Consensus the *miʿrāj* was body and soul and the Quran mentions sight literally.
XXXIII, 106, 1	Abū Bakr had promised her [ʿĀ'isha] to Muṭʿim for his son Jubayr.	Flimsy. Ibn Saʿd's report of this has an extremely weak chain through Hishām ibn Muḥammad ibn al-Sā'ib, from his father Abū al-Naḍr al-Kūfī from Abū Ṣāliḥ, from Ibn 'Abbās. Hishām and his father are both "discarded" *(matrūk)* and considered liars while the latter actually admitted to Sufyān al-Thawrī, "All I have narrated to you from Abū Ṣāliḥ is a lie" cf. al-Dhahabī, *Mīzān*; Ibn al-Jawzī, *Ḍuʿafā' wal-Matrūkīn.*
XXXVI, 116, 2	After a long discussion, when various suggestions had been made and rejected, they agreed – some of them with reluctance – to the plan put forward by Abū Jahl as being the only effective solution to their problem. Every clan was to nominate a strong, reliable and well-connected young man, and at a given moment all these chosen men together should fall upon Muḥammad, each striking him a mortal blow...	Inexplicable omission. The sources concur that the assassination plot was moderated by Iblīs in disguise. Asked who he was, he answered "An old man from Najd." The reports go on to refer to him as "The Old Man from Najd" *(al-shaykh al-najdī)*. Ibn Hishām (3:6-8); Ṭabarī, *Tafsīr* (9:227-228), *Tārīkh* (1:566-567); Baghawī, *Tafsīr* (2:244); Jaṣṣāṣ, *Aḥkām al-Qur'ān* (5:84), Abū Nuʿaym, *Dalā'il al-Nubuwwa* (p. 202); Ibn al-Jawzī, *Muntaẓam* (3:46-47); Kilāʿī, *Iktifā'* (1:334-335); Suhaylī, *Rawḍ al-Unuf* (2:307); *Sīra Ḥalabiyya* (2:190); Ibn Kathīr, *Tafsīr* ("*ṣaḥīḥ*" 2:302-303 on v. 8:30) and *Bidāya* (3:176); *Lubāb al-Nuqūl* (1:109); Suyūṭī, *Durr al-Manthūr* (4:51-52 v. 8:30), Shawkānī, *Fatḥ al-Qadīr* (2:304), etc.
XXXVII, 119, 1-3	[T]here were still some hours to go before sunset, although in fact there was strangely little light in the cave for the time of day they supposed it to be.... There, in front of it, almost covering the entrance, was an acacia tree, about the height of a man, which had not been there that morning.... [T]hey gently drew aside the web that had been their safeguard, and taking care not to disturb the dove, they went...	Poetic license overkill. There is no mention of "little light," the fact that the tree was acacia, its height, or solicitude for the cobweb and dove nest in the sources. Allāh knows best.

XXXIX, 125, 6	[T]he Prophet now made a covenant of mutual obligation between his followers and the Jews of the oasis, forming them into a single community of believers....	Historically and doctrinally false. Article 10 of the covenant states, “The Jews of the tribe of Banū ʿAwf shall be considered a separate nation alongside that of the believers.” Būṭī, *Jurisprudence of the Prophetic Biography* (p. 302) from Ibn Isḥāq and Aḥmad.
XL, 132, 2	The Prophet now decided that in addition to Umm Ayman Zayd should have a second wife, one nearer his own age, and he asked his cousin ʿAbd Allāh, the son of Jaḥsh, for the hand of his beautiful sister Zaynab.	Misinterpretation. Both Umm Ayman and Zayd were former slaves; rather than matching age the second marriage showed that, contrary to the prevalent pre-Islamic custom, the Sunna allowed a free Qurayshī woman to marry a pious former slave.
	At first Zaynab was unwilling, and she had reason to be so, as events were to disclose. The reason she gave, namely that she was a woman of Quraysh, was not convincing. Her mother, Umaymah, of pure Quraysh stock on both sides, had married a man of Asad; and quite apart from Zayd’s adoption into Quraysh, it could not be said that the tribes of his parents, the Bani Kalb and the Bani Ṭayy, were inferior to the Bani Asad.	Wrong teleology and gainsaying of Zaynab’s motivations. She was unwilling because of a sense of self-pride she truthfully disclosed and of which Zayd, her “mere *mawlā*” husband, was later to complain repeatedly, asking permission to divorce her not once but several times cf. al-Būṭī, *Kubrā al-Yaqīniyyāt al-Kawniyya* (p. 210-212). She in fact gave the most predictable – and convincing – reason imaginable so that the didactic purpose of the Prophet ﷺ became more probative.
XL, 133, 1	He ﷺ seemed, moreover, ageless, like an immortal.	Inappropriate conceit, more dithyramb than *Sīra*.
XL, 133, 2	I [ʿĀ’isha] was playing on a see-saw and my long streaming hair was dishevelled.	Mistranslation of “and I had shoulder-length hair” *(wa-lī jumayma / wa-anā mujammama).*
XLI, 137, 6	From that day Muslims have turned in the direction of the Kaʿbah for the performance of the ritual prayer, and by extension for other rites.	What other rites?
XLV, 155, 1	Sawdah... was astonished on her return to see her cousin and brother-in-law Suhayl, the chief of her clan, sitting in a corner of the room with his hands tied to his neck. The sight aroused long-forgotten sentiments and made her forget for the moment all that had replaced them. “O Abū Yazīd,” she expostulated, “all too readily didst thou surrender. Thou shouldst have died a noble death.” “Sawdah!” exclaimed the Prophet, whose presence she had not noticed. The reproof in his voice immediately brought her back, not without a sense of shame, from her pre-Islamic past to her Islamic present.	Inappropriate interpretation and surmising of Sawda’s mind. Ibn Isḥāq simply has: “I could not, by Allāh, contain myself when I saw Abū Yazīd in that state.... Suddenly I heard the Prophet ﷺ say from inside the house, ‘Sawda! Are you rousing up aggression against Allāh and His Prophet??’ I said, ‘Messenger of Allāh, by Him Who sent you with the truth, I could not contain myself when I saw Abū Yazīd with his hands tied to his neck.’”
XLVI, 162, 2	The Prophet’s face grew dark with anger.	Inappropriate mistranslation of “he was angered to the point they saw an awning *(ẓulalan)* over his face” or “until they saw his face overshadowed.”
XLVII, 165, 4	*He hath given you hearing and sight and heart-knowledge that ye may be thankful* (Q XVI, 78).	Over-interpretive translation of “hearts” as “heart-knowledge.”
XLVIII, 167-68 LIX, 218, 1	The People of the Bench. [*Ahl al-Ṣuffa*]	Mistranslation of the “People of the Shelter” *(ṣuffa).*
XLVIII, 168, 1	He none the less discouraged them in general from eating food that was overflavoured with garlic or onions, especially before going to the Mosque.	Mistranslation on three counts: He did not “discourage” them but actually *prohibited* them from eating *garlic and onion themselves*, and so not “especially,” but *only* before going to the Mosque.

LIV, 191, 1	[A]s regards the fighting itself, he told them to respect the human face as being the most godlike part of the body: “When one of you striketh a blow, let him avoid striking the face... for God created Adam in His image.”	Doctrinally false misinterpretation. There are three possible meanings, none of them what Lings claims. (1) Allāh created Ādam directly in Ādam’s final form without growth. (2) “Allāh created Ādam in the image of the Merciful” in that He shared with him aspects of His Attributes such as life, hearing, sight, and knowledge. The predication of image to the Merciful therefore signifies possession, dignity, and bestowal as in the attribute of possession in the verse ﴾**the she-camel of Allāh**﴿ (90:13), not body part or appearance.. (3) When one of you fights, let him avoid [striking] the face [of the enemy], for Allāh created Ādam in his [that man’s] likeness.
LIV, 192, 1	... a man of theirs named Usayrim...	Mispelling of Uṣayrim (with a *ṣād* nor *sīn*).
LV, 197, 1	[He] meant that they would enter Mecca and kiss Black Stone. *(sic)*	Doctrinally dubious grammar. Our liege-lord ʿUmar said the *ḥajar al-aswad* is a stone. None of the early Muslims, Ulema, and pious Friends of Allāh personalized it. It should be called *the* Black Stone.
LVI, 202, 2 LVII, 203, 1	[T]he Prophet insisted that blood-wite should be paid.... to help him pay the blood-wite.	Some English dictionaries do not have “blood-wite” but do have “wergeld.” (Both mean blood-money.)
LVIII, 212, 1	The Jew complained to the Prophet, whose face was full of anger when he rebuked the aggressor.	Inappropriate translation. The Prophet became angry until anger was visible on his face, no more and no less.
	[T]he Prophet added: “Say not that I am better than Moses.” He also said, perhaps referring to another example of misplaced zeal: “Let none of you say that I am better than Jonah.” The Revelation had already given them the words, as part of the Islamic creed: *We make no distinction between any of His messengers.* (2:285).	Wrong doctrine. There is Consensus the Prophet Muḥammad ﷺ is the Best of Messengers (Q 2:253). The “Do not say” reports addressed the nationalistic sense some tribal-minded followers indulge or are abrogated. Verse 2:285 excoriates the Christians who accept Moses and Jesus yet reject Muḥammad, and the Jews who reject the latter two.
LVIII, 212-213	Zayd was out, and Zaynab, not expecting any visitors at that time, was lightly clad. But when she was told that the Prophet had come, she was so eager to greet him that she leaped to her feet and ran to the door, to invite him to stay until Zayd returned. “He is not here, O Messenger of God”, she said, “but come thou in, my father and my mother be thy ransom.” As she stood in the doorway, a radiant figure of joyous welcome, the Prophet was amazed at her beauty. Deeply moved, he turned aside, and murmured something which she could not grasp. All she heard clearly were his words of wonderment as he walked away: “Glory be to God the Infinite! Glory be to Him Who disposeth men’s hearts!”	Mistranslation and tendentious exaggerations. The original states, “He came to his house asking for him but did not find him so Zaynab bint Jaḥsh, his wife, welcomed him instead. The Messenger of God turned away from her. She said, ‘He is not here, Messenger of God, but do come in, may my father and mother be ransomed for you!’ But he refused to come in. Zaynab had not covered herself in her haste upon being told the Messenger of God was at the door, so she had jumped to it in a rush. She caused the wonderment of the Messenger of God and he went away murmuring something she could not grasp, etc.” So the Prophet – who had known his cousin from childhood and had seen her again and again before the *ḥijāb* became law – shows full reserve and the scene is muted. The original (broken-chained) report shows decorum but Lings primps it into a bodice-ripper.
LX, 222, 3	“O Messenger of God,” he [ʿUmar] said, “I have been told that Bani Qurayẓah have broken their treaty and are at war with us.” The Prophet was visibly troubled.	Inappropriate mistranslation. “Visibly troubled” usually means physically or mentally disturbed or agitated in a conspicuous way while the original (in al-Wāqidī exclusively) simply states: “*Fa-(i)shtadda dhālika ʿalā Rasūlillāh* – this bore heavily upon him.” And there is no mention of its being conspicuous; the narrator might know this without it being visible to anyone but the like of Abū Bakr and ʿUmar.

LXI, 233, 2	She [Rayḥāna] was a woman of great beauty and she remained the Prophet's slave until she died some five years later.	False. Ibn Saʿd (8:220) relates from al-Wāqidī that there is consensus the Prophet ﷺ freed and married Rayḥāna cf. al-Dimyāṭī, *Nisā' Rasūl Allāh* ﷺ.
LXV, 243-244	It was generally thought that but for ʿĀ'ishah Zaynab would have been the Prophet's favourite wife...	Inappropriate generalization and interpretation of ʿĀ'ishah's observation that Zaynab "was the one among the wives who vied to surpass me *(tusāmīnī).*"
LXV, 244-245	[I]t was not enough that he [the Prophet ﷺ] should himself believe ʿĀ'ishah and Ṣafwān to be innocent. The situation was a grave one, and it was imperative to have evidence which would convince the whole community. To this end ʿĀ'ishah herself had proved the least helpful of all concerned. It was now time that her silence should be broken. Not that anything that she said could be enough to resolve the crisis. But the Koran promised that questions asked during the period of its revelation would be answered. In the present case the Prophet had filled the air with questions – the same question, reiterated to different persons – but for the promised answer to be given by Heaven, it was perhaps necessary that the question should already have been put to the person most closely involved.	Dismally inappropriate in substance and wording. There are some incisive observations, however, it is one thing to evaluate and psychologically conjecture the situation as a whole and another to train one's laboratory lens on the behavior of the Mother of the Believers and the Holy Prophet, upon him and her blessings and peace! These typically modernist gaffes could easily have been avoided with basic Muslim sensibility. There is no power nor might except in Allāh the Most High and Almighty!
LXVI, 247, 2	The Prophet was bareheaded and had already donned the age-old traditional pilgrim's dress of two pieces of unstitched cloth...	False etiology. Pre-Islamic pilgrims would either wear new clothes or, if they could not afford them, circumambulate the Kaʿba naked.
LXVIII, 257, 2	[Of the Companion Abū Baṣīr] "Alas for his mother!"* said the Prophet. "What a fine firebrand for war, had he but other men with him!" *Footnote: An often used ellipsis meaning: "The man is such a hothead that his mother will soon have to mourn his death."	Misinterpretation of idiomatic Arabic expletives and curses which, in certain contexts, are metaphorical expressions of wonder, approval, endearment, or encouragement such as "May your hands cleave to dust," "May your age not grow," "May your stomach not be sated," "May your mother lose you," etc.
LXVIII, 261, 2	In every generation of the Jews in Arabia there could be found one or two adepts in the science of magic; and one of these was amongst the Jews still living in Medina, Labīd by name, an expert sorcerer who had also instructed his daughters in the subtle art lest his own knowledge should die with him.	Inappropriate glamorization of what is considered, in Islām, a filthy skill. Even Aristotle in his *Ethics* mentioned as a truism that an evil knowledge is not considered knowledge at all. Such language is not from the earliest sources but from Lings' own *dhawq.*
LXIX, 268, 4	When the Prophet took a mouthful of lamb, Bishr did the same and swallowed it, but the Prophet spat out what was in his mouth, saying to the others: "Hold off your hands! This shoulder proclaimeth unto me that it is poisoned." He sent for the woman.... [Bishr] died shortly afterwards. But the Prophet nonetheless pardoned the woman.	Incorrect. The Prophet pardoned the women for trying to kill him *then* Bishr died and she was executed for his murder.
LXIX, 269, 3	Ibn al-Akwaʿ, the Aslamite who had sung to them on their northward march, had been killed at Khaybar during the attack upon the Citadel. His own sword had somehow turned against him and given him a mortal wound...	Needlessly mysterious. All the reports are clear it was an accidentally self-inflicted mortal wound.

LXX, 271, 3	ʿĀ'ishah was at that time in her sixteenth year, ~~old for her age in some respects but not in others. Her feelings were always clear from her face, and nearly always from her tongue~~.	Apart from the usual lapse into fiction and speculation of what one cannot possibly know, an air of inappropriateness mars all such observations and makes the reader wish them to go away.
LXX, 271, 4	The Revelation had said of him: *Verily of an immense magnitude is thy nature.* ~~It was as if he were a whole world in himself, comparable to the outer world and in some ways mysteriously one with it~~.	More paganization of the person of the Holy Prophet ﷺ (in a style reminiscent of the high-flown theologizing about Christ in the Greek and Latin *Patrologiae*), which the Prophet ﷺ vigorously forbade.
LXXI, 275, 4	[W]hen ʿUmar's voice was heard asking permission to enter there was a sudden total silence and the women hid themselves behind the curtain with such speed that he entered to ~~find the Prophet speechless with laughter~~.	False translation due to ignorance of the Prophetic attributes. "Speechless with laughter" suggests cachinnation but the Companions said "His laughter was silent" and "consisted in smiling." He warned against uncontrolled laughter as causing the death of the heart.
LXXI, 276, 4	[T]here could be no doubt that ~~all was not well in the Prophet's household~~.	Inappropriate literary drama obscuring the wisdom of the Prophetic paradigm; his household was Paradise on earth and, at the same time, mercifully similar to a normal household with its tensions.
LXXI, 277, 1	[T]he ruler of Egypt sent... as the crown of the gift, two Coptic Christian slave girls escorted by an ~~elderly~~ eunuch. "The girls were sisters, Māriyah and Sīrīn, and ~~both were beautiful, but Māriyah was exceptionally so," and the Prophet marveled at her beauty~~.	Dubious report and the usual ultra-sensual emphases. Ibn Saʿd claims this Mābūr was their elderly brother while everyone else states he was a young kinsman *(ghulām)* in charge of guarding them during the trip. The reports detail his agility and the incident of his later being suspected of adultery before it was discovered he was an eunuch. As for beauty only Māriyah is thus described, literally as "lustrous" *(waḍī'a)*, "white" *(bayḍā')*, "curly-haired" *(jaʿdā')*, "beautiful" *(jamīla)*, and the Prophet ﷺ liked her *(uʿjiba bihā)*.
LXXI, 277, 2	[T]he Koran itself expressly allowed a master to take his bondmaid as concubine ~~on condition of her free consent~~.	Unconditionally (Q 23:6, 33:50, 70:30). A bondmaid is not asked as she does not own herself cf. al-Shāfiʿī, *Umm* (5:17) and Suḥnūn, *Mudawwana* (2:140).
LXXII, 285, 5	[T]he Prophet took off ~~an undergarment he was wearing~~, and told them to wrap her [his daughter Zaynab] in it before they shrouded her.	Mistranslation. The original text states *fa'aʿṭānā ḥaqwah*, "he gave us his loin-wrap," *ḥaqw* being synonymous with *izār*, with the definite possessive adjective, not an indefinite article, and without explicit mention of his wearing it though it is implied.
LXXIII, 289, 3	[After Zayd's death at Mu'ta] Zayd's little daughter came out into the street in tears, and seeing him [the Prophet ﷺ] she ran into his arms. ~~He now wept unrestrainedly, and as he clasped the child to him his body shook with sobs~~.	Inappropriate embroidery. The original simply says: "Zayd's daughter ran in tears to the Messenger of Allāh ﷺ and the latter wept until he was out of breath *(fa-bakā ḥattā intaḥaba)*." Blessings and peace on him and them now and always.
LXXX, 327, 2	As the child [Ibrāhīm] breathed his last.... The Prophet continued to weep, and ~~when he could find his voice~~ he said....	The original simply states that the Prophet ﷺ spoke normally, without suggestion of his being overwhelmed by emotions.
LXXXIV, 343, 4 LXXXIV, 344, 1	[T]he Prophet's fever abated, and although he was exceedingly weak the call to prayer decided him to go to the Mosque.... he made his way forward, helped by Faḍl ~~and by Thawbān~~, one of his freedmen.... The Prophet returned to ʿĀ'ishah's apartment helped by Faḍl and Thawbān.	The sound reports mention not Thawbān here but only ʿAlī, his cousin al-Faḍl, and the latter's father al-ʿAbbās, Allāh be well-pleased with them, as helping the Holy Prophet ﷺ in his last walk to the Mosque – and Allāh knows best.

LXXX, 324, 1	The traditional accounts differ as to the state of soul in which he [ʿAbd Allāh ibn Ubay ibn Salūl] died, but all are unanimous that the Prophet led the funeral prayer for him.	There is consensus in all the accounts that he died in the same state of diplomatic rejection as he had lived. One should seek refuge in Allāh from the perils and foolishness of misguided interpretation.
	According to one tradition, when the Prophet had already taken his stance for the prayer, ʿUmar went to him and protested against the bestowal of such grace upon a hypocrite,but the Prophet answered him, saying with a smile: "Stand thou behind me, ʿUmar. I have been given the choice, and I have chosen. It hath been said unto me: *Ask forgiveness of them, or ask it not, though thou ask forgiveness for them seventy times, yet will not God forgive them* (Q 9:80). And did I know that God would forgive him if I prayed more than seventy times, I would increase the number of my supplications."	Not only "one tradition" but all the traditions in the books of *Sīra* on which Lings based his work as well as al-Bukhārī, Muslim, the *Sunan*, Aḥmad, and the early books of Qurān commentary including al-Ṭabarī as well as his history cf. Abū Nuʿaym's *Ṭuruq Ḥadīth Ṣalāt al-Nabī* ﷺ *ʿalā Ibn Ubay*. This does not mean the Prophet ﷺ thought Ibn Ubay was other than a hypocrite but only that he ﷺ wished to preserve the honor of Ibn Ubay's Muslim son as well as win over Ibn Ubay's Khazrajī tribesmen if they saw his kind treatment of him, since there was no explicit Divine prohibition yet against showing such good will in the first place.
	Not long afterwards the verse was revealed, with reference to the hypocrites: *And never pray the funeral prayer over one of them who dieth, nor stand beside his grave, for verily they disbelieved in God and His Messenger, and died in their iniquity* (Q 9:84). But according to other traditions* this verse had been already revealed as part of the Revelation which came immediately after the return from Tabūk. *Footnote: Mirkhond, *Rawḍat al-Ṣafā'*, II, vol. 2, pp. 671-2, citing earlier sources. See also B[ukhārī] XXIII, 76.	This is false both historically and hermeneutically. In addition, it is not "other traditions" but a single tradition in al-Ṭabarī that states that *after* the verse was revealed, some of those who had stayed behind during the campaign of Tabūk repented upon hearing the verse and confessed to their hypocrisy, whereupon the verses of repentence were revealed (9:101-104) and the Prophet ﷺ accepted their alms. There is nothing in al-Bukhārī but the opposite of what Lings forwards. As for his main source, it is a 9th-century AH book of history written in Persian by the Afghān Muḥammad ibn Kwāndshāh Mīrkhwānd (836-903)! It would be unthinkable that a serious biographer of Jesus and the Disciples who bases himself on "the earliest sources" suddenly jump down several centuries and into a completely different linguistic and geographical region, using a quotation from, say, Einhard's 9th-century CE biography of Charlemagne in order to contradict something agreed upon in the Four Gospels and the Epistles!
	Nor was it any longer applicable to Ibn Ubayy, for the Prophet visited him in his illness and found that the imminence of death had changed him. He asked the Prophet to give him a garment of his own in which he could be shrouded, and to accompany his body to the grave, which the Prophet agreed to do. Then again he spoke, saying: "O Messenger of God, I hope that thou wilt pray beside my bier, and ask forgiveness of God for my sins." Again the Prophet assented, and after his death he did as he had promised.	Everything Ibn Ubayy did and said on his deathbed in this (broken-chained) report was orchestrated for his son to save face after him while everything the Prophet ﷺ said and did with Ibn Ubayy was meant as a summon of goodwill to those the latter left behind as is clear from Ibn Ubayy's gibe which is studiously omitted: "I did not call for you to come and admonish me but to ask forgiveness for me" and as elaborated by Ibn Ḥajar in *Fatḥ al-Bārī* and others. That "the imminence of death had changed him" is not found in the original and is therefore Lingsian license and speculation.
LXXXV, 347, 3	Even after one day, the Prophet's body seemed to be sunken merely in sleep, except there was no breathing and no pulse and no warmth.	More of the same. And Allāh Most High knows best and to Him is our return. Blessings and peace on the Prophet, his Family, and all his Companions.

Glorified be thy Lord, the Lord of majesty, from what they attribute unto Him, and peace be unto those sent to warn, and praise be to Allāh, Lord of the Worlds!

Mount Qasyoun, Damascus
Night of 29 Ramaḍān 1426 / 31 October 2005